

**OPENING REMARKS BY DEPUTY SECRETARY CHUCK CONNER
USDA AGRICULTURAL OUTLOOK FORUM
ARLINGTON, VA – MARCH 1, 2007**

Good morning and welcome to the Agricultural Outlook Forum 2007.

I'm Deputy Secretary Chuck Conner and it's my pleasure to open this conference.

I want to extend a warm welcome to everyone here in Arlington, Virginia and those tuning into the Webcast of these events.

This year we have more than 100 speakers and panelists from across the U.S. ... and from New Zealand, Japan, Europe and South America.

They are highly distinguished in their fields and we are very fortunate to have them with us.

Chief Economist Keith Collins and Deputy Under Secretary for Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services Ellen Terpstra will lead today's program with a first assessment of agricultural, trade and policy prospects for 2007.

This year's theme -- "Agriculture at the Crossroads: Energy, Farm & Rural Policy" -- sets the stage for a comprehensive look at biofuels and renewable energy and their place in the 2007 Farm Bill.

In his keynote address, Secretary Mike Johanns will discuss the need to move forward on a new Farm Bill that responds to the market and trade conditions that we face today, rather than letting events overtake us.

We are privileged to have the architect of the White House energy policy as our guest speaker.

Allan Hubbard is Assistant to the President for Economic Policy and Director of the National Economic Council.

Following these discussions, members of our distinguished Plenary Panel will present their unique perspectives on renewable energy.

They are the highest officials of some of the nation's leading corporations and trade groups ... Patricia Woertz of Archer Daniels Midland, John Johnson of CHS, Gregory Page of Cargill, Inc., and Red Cavaney of the American Petroleum Institute.

Scott Kilman, who covers agriculture and energy for the Wall Street Journal, will moderate the question and answer period that follows their discussion.

I am very pleased to tell you that this year we are introducing the USDA Outlook Forum Student Diversity Program. In the audience are 11 junior and senior students from Land Grant universities who earned these spots through their winning essays.

Congratulations to the students and sincere thanks to the sponsoring corporations -- including CHS, John Deere Company, and the Farm Credit Bank of Texas.

We also appreciate the help of Dr. Ahmed Jilani (*Jill – anee*) from the University of Maryland, Eastern Shore, in administering this program.

In these two days, some of the most thoughtful minds in food and agriculture will explore today's historic challenges. They will look at energy in several forms, including biofuels, biobutanol, cellulosic, wind, solar, and methane.

Two special farm bill sessions will present farm policy from different perspectives.

Concurrent sessions will address major issues facing agriculture in the areas of risk management, international standards in facilitating safe trade, and innovations for controlling foodborne pathogens.

Other important topics include nutrition marketing and consumer behavior; immigration and the agricultural labor market; enhancing productivity and genetic diversity; and water quality trading.

Some of the traditional commodity sessions touch on some of the underlying themes of this Forum.

Our dinner speaker tonight – Governor Mitch Daniels – will present his perspective on “21st Century Economic Development – A Renewed Focus on Agriculture.”

(First Introduction)

Opening this Forum with the 2007 Economic and Trade Outlook are two individuals whose experience, knowledge and guidance benefit USDA and the entire agricultural community.

The Secretary and I look to their advice and counsel on complex matters from international trade negotiations to proposals for the 2007 Farm Bill.

Heading the Office of the Chief Economist, Dr. Keith Collins is an anchor at USDA ... advising the Secretary on programs, policies, regulations and legislative proposals.

He led the team of top economists who issued analysis papers on major themes that surfaced in the Farm Bill listening sessions. The Secretary and I will look to Dr. Collins as we continue to prepare for the 2007 Farm Bill.

Among Dr. Collins' responsibilities are commodity forecasts, global change analysis, and energy policy and new uses for agricultural products.

He is also Chair of the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation.

Ellen Terpstra was named Deputy Under Secretary for Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services one year ago.

She came to this position after heading the department's Foreign Agricultural Service, where her responsibilities included international trade negotiations, foreign food aid, and export assistance programs.

Before joining USDA, Ms. Terpstra was president and chief executive officer of the USA Rice Federation and president of the U.S. Apple Association.

She has extensive government experience, including as a trade negotiator for the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative.

In the past year, Ms. Terpstra has been involved with efforts to reopen export markets to U.S. beef. She has participated in the agriculture discussions for the Doha Round and in bilateral talks with trading partners, notably China, Japan and India.

Ladies and gentlemen, Keith Collins and Ellen Terpstra ...

(They spoke from 8:15 – 8:45 a.m.)

8:45 a.m.

(Introduction of Secretary Mike Johanns)

And now it's my privilege to introduce a gentleman I've had the pleasure of working with for almost two years.

From the start, two traits about Mike Johanns have been very clear: first, he lives his open door policy; and second, he has a passion for U.S. agriculture that crosses all issues and encourages all viewpoints.

He has taken an open mike across the country, urging farmers and ranchers to be part of an historic discussion on farm policy.

That discussion is now a national debate framed by Farm Bill proposals that recognize emerging priorities and offer policy that is predictable to farmers, that is more equitable and able to withstand international challenge.

In the past year, Mike Johanns has been part of the U.S. effort to bring the Doha Round of WTO negotiations to a successful conclusion.

He leads USDA's ongoing efforts to reopen export markets to U.S. beef and stresses the importance of science in trade, as in all areas of food and agriculture.

He believes in federal support of agriculture as a wise investment and is highly optimistic about agriculture's future, in part because of emerging areas like bioenergy.

He has championed renewable fuels and the promise of energy from agriculture from the time he was Governor of Nebraska ...

Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in welcoming Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns ...